DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 257 956 CE 041 587

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TITLE Age Integrated Learning: A Theoretical Model.
PUB DATE Nov 84
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Scientific Meeting of the Gerontological Society (37th, San Antonio, TX, November 16-20, 1984). For a related document, see CE 041 586.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adult Development; *Adult Education; Adults; Aging (Individuals); Coping; Decision Making; *Developmental Psychology; Educational Gerontology; Educational Planning; *Educational Theories; Higher Education; *Individual Development; Models; Personality Theories; *Social Psychology; Social Support Groups; Sociology; Stress Management
IDENTIFIERS *Age Integrated Learning; Crisis Management, *Erikson (Erik); Intergenerational Learning

ABSTRACT

The concept of age integrated learning (AIL) can be derived from Erikson's theory of psychosocial development. Two emphases in his theory that are less well recognized than others are central to Erikson's theory and are the cornerstone of a rationale for AIL. The first is his emphasis on the interdependence of generations for optimal crisis resolution and healthy individual psychosocial development. Crisis resolution is a continuous process in which individuals at different stages of development provide support for one another in that they are confronting the same crisis issues at different levels of muturity. A second emphasis is his focus on the cognitive/intellectual, rather than simply the affective or emotional, underpinnings of individual psychosocial development. From Erikson's life span developmental theory, a connection can be made with recent theoretical statements from experimental social psychology and empirical sociology. The literature on personal control, stress, and social support is consistent with an age integrated approach to learning and is a logical extension of Erikson's thinking. (YLB)

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Age Integrated Learning: A Theoretical Model

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The general practice of adult education has come a long way. Theory underlying this practice, however, is limited; and both practice and theory regarding age integrated learning (AIL) are almost nonexistent. Covey (1980) notes: "The literature concerning older people and their relationship to higher education is characterized by a lack of theory and empirical support. If empirical support is provided it is usually descriptive and makes little or no effort at testing theory. None of the major theories of social aging have been applied to higher education" (p. 174).

We have found one attempt at sound theorizing with respect to adult education. The work of Rebok and Offermann (1983) developed a specific model to study the nature of older adults' behavioral competencies in college classrooms derived from Bandura's (1982) self-efficacy theory.

The only attempt at an empirical test of AIL that we were able to locate was that of Kay, Jensen-Osinski, Beidler, and Aronson (1983). These authors mention that as far as they could determine, theirs was the first such study. Fourteen "regular" freshman and 10 older adults (60's+) completed a for-credit Freshman English course. The data allow the following tentative conclusions:

(1) The young students in the mixed class gained more positive attitudes toward their own aging and toward intergenerational learning.

(2) There was a balanced amount of class participation (discussion and interaction) across the generations and the total amount of activity was equal to or greater than that of control group classes.

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(3) Academic performance (quality of written essays) in the AIL class was equal to or better than control group classes. The authors conclude their article with: "The exchange between generations does more than help older and younger students understand each other: it provides a stimulating atmosphere for learning in which the benefits accrue not only to the older but to the younger students as well" (p. 199).

At the level of descriptive research, Covey (1982) reported the results of survey research that included older individuals' preferences regarding AIL. He concluded: "The results from the sample were in favor of the promotion of inter-age relations in education. Further, these older students preferred classes with students of all ages; very few (9.5%) preferred age segregated classes. Of those interviewed, the overwhelming majority favored age integrated classes and some indicated that contact with younger students was a major reason for attending college" (p. 469).

It appears that the time is now for theory based research in AIL. Covey (1983) states: "As higher education expands to meet the needs of older people, it will draw upon whatever resources are available. Social gerontological theory may and should provide theoretical guidance to shapers of future higher education" (p. 10).

The goal of this paper is to begin this effort. In the sections which follow we will show that the concept of age integrated learning can be derived from Erikson's theory of psychosocial development as a general framework with complementary and specific applications and derivations from personal control theory and theory related to stress and social support.

Rationale for AIL Based on Erikson's Theory

While Erikson's theory (1959, 1963, 1982) is one of the most widely recognized theories in developmental psychology in general and in adult

development and aging, certain components of emphases in his theory have been less well recognized than others, viz., his emphasis on the importance of intergenerational interchange for optimal individual psychological development and his focus on the cognitive/intellectual, rather than simply the affective or emotional, underpinnings of individual psychosocial development. We propose that these two emphases are indeed central to Eriksonian theory and we have taken them as a cornerstone of our rationale for AIL.

It is commonly recognized that in Erikson's view individuals face "crises" or decision points throughout life which allow for individual growth from babyhood to old age. These "crises" or "decisions", simply put, result in the development or the failure in development of perceived and actual strengths in both self definition and evaluation and interpersonal interaction. Less well recognized, perhaps, is Erikson's emphasis on the interdependence of generations for optimal crisis resolution, for healthy individual development. Indeed, his emphasis on "life cycle" includes not only the idea that developmental growth occurs throughout the individual's life course but also that the outcomes of individual development depend on interchanges between such individuals and others at different stages of their own life course. For the young adult developing a sound identity and a capacity for real intimacy, the middle-aged adult developing generativity, and the older adult developing integrity, it is in the communication between and among generations that each is given the chance to work through developmental changes adaptively and to develop the ego strengths which come from favorable decisions regarding one's perception of self and self-in-relation-to-others.

In a very general statement of the importance of intergenerational interaction, Erikson (1964) writes:

> ...the individual ego can be strong only through a mutual guarantee of strength given to and received by all whose life-cycles intertwine. Whatever chance man may have to transcend the limitations of his ego seems to depend on his prior ability, in his one and only life cycle, to be fully engaged in the sequence of generations (p. 157).

The most fundamental rationale for this statement is in Erikson's conception of psychosocial development and crisis resolution themselves. That is, the particular crisis (e.g., generativity) that an individual faces at a given period represents the salience or prominence of certain issues at that particular time. But, all crisis issues are present at each stage and need to be dealt with at some level--so that previous crises are "re-resolved" and the foundation laid for resolution of subsequent ones. That is, that a crisis such as integrity comes "after" generativity means only that it is a "later version" (Erikson, 1982, p. 63).

Crisis resolution, for Erikson, then, is not "an achievement, secured once and for all at a given state" (Erikson, 1963, p. 273). It is, rather, a continuous process in which individuals at different stages of development provide support for one another in that (a) they are all confronting the same crisis issues, and (b) they are confronting these issues at different levels of maturity--with younger generations optimally providing a fresh and stimulating perspective on issues confronted earlier by members of older generations and adults providing a more mature perspective for younger adults and children. It is to this complementarity that Erikson (1964) refers when he says "Members of the same age group share analogous combinations of capacities and opportunities, and members of different age groups depend on each other for the mutual activation of their complementary ego strength" (p. 165).

While Erikson clearly and explicitly argues for the need for intergenerational interchange, we could find no direct statements in his theory advocating AIL specifically. But, we propose that the theory, indeed, supports such a program and that it does so by virtue of the most essential and prominent aspects of the theory itself. It is proposed that the theory (a) emphasizes the import of cognitive functioning in individual psychosocial development and (b) suggests that the mechanism by which intergenerational interchange supports development is by way of the shared exchange of perspectives--enlightened by education and life experience--on coping with developmental tasks.

Erikson's theory may, indeed, be interpreted as suggesting that ego development in adolescence, young adulthood, middle adulthood, and old age is framed within the cognitive functioning of the individual, with resolution of later crises being more and more demanding (Keller, 1978, 1984) and thus requiring continuing educational and intellectual stimulation.

Referring to identity achievement Erikson (1968) states, "without an ideological simplification of the universe the adolescent cannot organize experience according to its specific capacities and expanding involvement" (p. 27). In old age, however, the person faced with the final life-crisis of ego integrity versus despair needs to recognize not only the value of commitments made in adolescence and realized in adulthood but also the relativity of these commitments, to defend and value his/her life style but also to see it as only one of many so valuable. The aged individual, then, is faced with looking back on life and integrating in a positive way considerations of preoccupation with self and concern for others, of successes and failures, of acceptance and rejection, of life and death. The formal operational adolescent or young adult has freed him/herself from the naive

tolerance of contradiction in thought which characterizes the child. The man or woman in old age, however, in order to resolve the last of Erikson's crises may need to go beyond logical formal operational thought to what has been described as a fifth stage of cognitive development (Lawler, 1975; Riegel, 1973, 1976) wherein he or she can, in a more sophisticated manner than the young child, appreciate contradictions and acknowledge the interdependence of opposing emotions, experiences, and values.

If, indeed, Erikson both states directly and suggests the import of intellectual processes in psychosocial development and if, indeed, the "organ of active mastery" or the ego is the central focus of Erikson's theory and both the challenges faced and the virtues which emerge in the course of development relate to the ego, it might be argued that a central mechanism by which intergenerational interchange fosters individual development lies in the mutual exchange of perspectives, plans, experiences, information. Erikson (1964) states that the principle that governs effective interpersonal relations is that of "active choice" (p. 232); that is, that each participant in the interchange is helped by virtue of the interchange to better understand, to develop, to use strengths in dealing with life experiences.

Though Erikson does not use the term we believe his writings suggest that the mechanism by which intergenerational interchange supports positive psychosocial development is by providing "social support." That is, it is consistent with his view to say that it is the middle aged adult who has been prepared for the choices and demands of adult life by education and who has continued to keep intellectually active who can best support both the young adult and older adult in their decision making. It should be the young adult who feels prepared by education to face the decisions involved in identity achievement who can be most receptive to feedback from peers, from middle and

older adults and who can engage in a truly mutual interchange. And, it should be the older adult who has developed or is developing wisdom, i.e., experience and accumulated knowledge, who can best give to and accept input from members of younger generations. We would ask, then, how better to foster the intellectual development and to support the cognitive demands of crisis resolution of young adult, adult, and aged individuals than to bring them together in an educational environment?

Rationale for AIL Based on Personal Control, Stress, and Social Support

The first part of this paper presented a theoretical basis for age integrated learning (AIL) from the perspective of personality theory/individual psychology. In what follows, we will try to show that from Erikson's life span developmental theory, a connection can be made with recent theoretical statements from experimental social psychology and empirical sociology. Specifically, it will be shown that the literature on personal control, stress, and social support is consistent with an age integrated approach to learning, and is a logical extension of Erikson's thinking.

The notion of control has received an exceptional amount of theoretical and research attention under related labels such as cognitive-, perceived-, personal-control, self-efficacy, attribution, mastery, competency, and learned helplessness. The construct has been clearly established as a useful one for predicting well-being, both physical and psychological. More specifically, it has been shown that it is a major mediating mechanism between stress and the reactions to stress. That is, the extent to which an individual has personal control over a stressor predicts whether the outcome will have positive or negative consequences. Going one step further, it has also been argued that the variable, social support, can be involved in the control-stress relationship in one of two ways: (a) social support is primarily viewed as a

moderator of stress reactions, and on occasion, (b) it is viewed as a source of stress itself.

The theoretical basis for AIL will be derived from the work done on the above variables and their relationships -- personal control, stress, and social support.

Personal Control. In its some one hundred years of existence, scientific psychology has confirmed few "general laws." One proposition, however, is now considered to be close to that status. That is, all living organisms, and especially humans, have a fundamental need to predict and control their environment. Many developmental theorists use this notion as a basic factor for successful development.

Recent major review articles have strongly supported the usefulness of this construct. For the present purpose, it is important to note the work of Averill (1973). He has clearly shown the need to emphasize the informational (i.e., cognitive) dimension of control. Bandura's (1982) work, perhaps surprisingly, confirms this. Finally, Seligman's revised version of learned helplessness (Garber & Seligman, 1982), with its inclusion of an attributional analysis of behavior-outcome contingencies, postulates that cognitive processing of information is necessary to predict control related outcomes in humans. An age integrated class that has outcomes which include increased understanding of self and others has implications for the development of control based on information for all ages involved.

Finally, Butler (cited in Lazarus & DeLongis, 1983) notes,"...throughout life people struggle to make sense out of what happens to them and to provide themselves with a sense of order and continuity. This struggle is centered in divergent personal beliefs and commitments, shapes cognitive appraisals of stressful transactions and coping, and therefore has profound consequences for

morale, social and work functioning, and somatic health. It is thus not age alone, but the significance of stressful events viewed within the continuity of a person's life that must be taken into account." (p. 247)

The compelling conclusion from the above kinds of theory and research is that personal control is an important variable to consider in life span development. Note then, Brim's observations as reported by Lazarus and Delongis (1983): "The general trend across the life span is that the sense of personal control increases steadily during childhood, remains fairly stable through much of adulthood, and then declines in later life" (p. 252). It appears that the issue of control and how it might be facilitated with AIL is of considerable significance.

Stress. The literature on stress is as firmly established as is that for perceived control. The general line of argument is as follows -- all humans are constantly exposed to stress; the major determinant of the outcomes of stress is the individual's ability to cope with the stress, and, in turn, the major determinant of successful coping strategies is the extent to which the individual has perceived control over the stressor.

For the present discussion, it is important to note an assumption that has been made in most of the research on stress. With two exceptions, stress has been assumed to be always a negative event. Only the consequences have possible differential valances. Of the two exceptions, it is curious that the first is the work of Hans Selye (1965), the originator of the stress concept. He made his point clear with the use of the terms "distress" (negtative stress) and "eustress" (positive stress). The other is the important empirical work of Suzanne Kobasa (1979) which is derived from Fiske and Maddi's (1965) theory of stimulus variation. Who Thrives Under Stress (Kobasa, 1979, is a telling title of her paper that concludes that, "...those

who have a sense of commitment to the various aspects of their lives, ...who believe that they have control over their lives, and who seek novelty and challenge, will remain relatively healthy" (p. 596). These kinds of people eagerly search out stress in the sense of Selye's eustress.

Heckenmueller (1985) has recently reviewed the literature on this theoretical issue and presented a model that is applicable to theory development in AIL. In this model, stress is viewed in the most general sense as "a process of transactions between the individual and the environment" (Frankenhaeuser, 1978; Lazarus, 1977) rather than as the more traditional "any threat to the organism" (Renner & Birren, 1980). The implication of the former definition is that stress is viewed as a state of arousal with relatively neutral affect. It takes on a positive or negative valence only after it has been cognitively processed by the individual affected. The reasoning concludes that the major dimension of this cognitive processing is personal control. If the individual perceives the stressor as being within his/her ability to control, the result is a positive motivation to approach the stressor and use it for enhancement of well-being. Viewing the stressor as beyond one's control leads to negative affect and attendant coping/defensive strategies to minimize or eliminate its effects, both physical and psychological.

If AIL is a stressor, then, consistent with the above reasoning, it may result in either a positive approach stimulus or a negative avoidance stimulus as a function of how the participants interpret it in terms of control. Can we specify more precisely what element(s) of the complex stimulus called AIL actually define it as a stressor? Our view is that a significant component is its social character. It is the interpersonal relationship setting, the intergenerational mix, that sets AIL apart from learning in general, and adult

learning in particular. The presence of others in this setting and specifically others from different age groups is a stressor that may be interpreted as positive or negative.

Our line of theoretical reasoning suggests that we look at AIL as a source of social support. Social support is a stressor and this leads to the final variable of focus.

Social Support. As mentioned earlier, the bulk of previous research has looked at social support primarily as a moderator of stress reactions. If, however, social support is taken as a source of stress, i.e., an independent variable, then the present reasoning argues that it will be perceived as positive or negative as a function of the meaning it has for the individual in terms of perceived control. This is perhaps a non-obvious relationship, i.e., that support can have negative as well as positive consequences.

The Heckenmueller (1985) model gives details of this derivation citing considerable empirical support. In summary, it suggests that if social support is a stressor, then consistent with the literature on control and stress a major function of social support is the informational value it provides to the individual (Averill, 1979; Caplan, 1981; Lefcourt et al. 1981). For example, Lefcourt et al. (1981) report research that individuals who are high on internality (and thus better able to make use of problem solving information) were the only ones to benefit from social support under stressful conditions. The upshot of this and other studies is that the function of social support is to provide information leading to perceived control.

Other studies have shown that under certain conditions, the lack of social support does not lead to negative consequences whereas its presence can be deleterious (Brown, 1979; Silver & Wortman, 1980; Sklar & Anisman, 1981).

The common denominator seems to be consistency of social support. Too little or too much as compared to some expected amount based on past history can be perceived as a threat. All of these studies point to the same explanatory variable -- perceived control. To the extent that social support facilitates perceived control through information, to that extent general well-being is enhanced.

The application of the personal control function of social support to AIL has potentially profound implications. It may well contribute to a resolution of the apparently contradictory findings regarding previous attempts at research and theorizing about AIL.

Empirical questions can be derived from the model to test its validity. For example: (1) Will the intergenerational interaction facilitate resolution of appropriate age related psychosocial crises? (2) More specifically, will AIL facilitate the development of ego integrity in older adults? (3) Will presenting AIL to the students as a positive social support, i.e., a positive stressor, result in increased personal control? (4) Will an emphasis on the cognitive informational value of the interage mix increase personal control? Many research questions such as these need to be generated and tested under experimental conditions. We hope the theoretical model presented will stimulate colleagues to initiate this necessary research.

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